

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: The Phenomenology of Investigating Campus Sexual Violence

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Federal law has required colleges and universities to respond to sexual violence on their campuses (Office of Civil Rights [OCR], 2011, 2014; Title IX, 1972). Despite federal mandates on institutional response to sexual violence, there is a lack of empirical inquiry into the experiences of those who investigate campus sexual violence. To address the gap in literature regarding the experiences and perspectives of people who engage in the administrative investigation of complaints of campus sexual violence, I explored the experiences of seven full-time student affairs and academic affairs professional who serve as Title IX investigators of student complaints of sexual violence. This study was conducted at a four-year public, state-assisted residential midsize university. As an insider researcher, I conducted an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) to better understand the lived experiences of investigators. This study revealed the complex, emotional, and conflicted lived experience of Title IX investigators as categorized by five central themes, a) emotional response, b) investigator identity and perceptions, c) investigative process, policy, and practice, d) understanding and perceiving others, and e) the intersection of law and education. These central themes suggested that these particular investigators similarly experience the phenomenon of investigating campus sexual violence. These findings prove applicable to the selection, training,

and management of investigators. Further, findings support avenues for future research into the areas of investigator demographics, investigator identity, exploring experiences of other professionals, policy research, exploration of student experiences and perceptions, and investigator role in institutional betrayal.